

Say Amen, Everybody, 15 Years Down the Line

When Wynton Marsalis unveiled his sanctified long-form composition "In This House, on This Morning" 15 years ago, it marked a breakthrough for him as well as for Jazz at Lincoln

MUSIC REVIEW

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Center, where he had recently begun his tenure as artistic director. So it might be tempting to view the piece's revival this week as an act of misty nostalgia, the equivalent of dusting off a scrapbook, or a treasured hymnal, and gingerly turning pages.

Maybe it does serve that purpose on some level. But there were much greater rewards on Thursday night, as Mr. Marsalis and his reunited septet performed the first of three season-closing concerts at the Rose Theater. Their interpretation of the work was more than authoritative: It was much stronger and clearer than the original recording (a double album, issued in 1994) and performance (as documented on a DVD re-

"In This House, on This Morning" will be performed again tonight at Frederick P. Rose Hall, Jazz at Lincoln Center, 60th Street and Broadway; (212) 721-6500, jalc.org.

Wynton Marsalis
Rose Theater

leased last year).

Building on the bedrock of spirituals, blues and swing, with a structure borrowed from the gospel church, "In This House" advances a traditional ideal of African-American cultural expression. But it also reflects ambitions and techniques traceable to post-bop and other relatively recent strains of jazz. It's a decidedly contemporary work, with a twitchy sensibility that might almost be described as postmodern.

As before, "Devotional," the overture, began with a single melodic line played by Wess Anderson on soprano saxophone. Its first four notes were familiar — Leonard Bernstein employed a similar phrase in "Somewhere," from "West Side Story" — but then came a piercing, upward-swooping cry. The phrase proved to be a motif, resurfacing in a movement titled "Altar Call (Introspection)," and again as a rumbling piano allusion in "Holy Ghost." (The pianist, Richard Johnson, was the only member of the band not to appear in



Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times

From left, Wycliffe Gordon, Reginald Veal and Wynton Marsalis performing "In This House, on This Morning."

the original concert and recording, and he filled the post admirably.)

Collectivism is a major point of the piece, but there's ample space for individual statements, both notated

and improvised. Mr. Marsalis played a muezzinlike trumpet part early on, in "Call to Prayer." The tenor saxophonist Todd Williams devised a strong succession of blues choruses

on "Introspection." The trombonist Wycliffe Gordon delivered several rousing solos, notably on an up-tempo gospel stomp called "Invocation."

That movement offered an almost

A celebrated ensemble reunites to revisit an ambitious piece.

literal appropriation of church music, and served as a pinnacle of the concert. After Mr. Gordon's blaring testimony, Mr. Marsalis offered his own, fanning a bowler-hat mute over the bell of his horn. He sat on one note for a while before nudging the band up a step, and then another, echoing a heavenward climb. It was no surprise that the audience leapt to its feet when the tune came crashing home.

Vocals provided some of the other highlights, including a sermon of sorts by the bassist Reginald Veal. One spine-tingling movement had a guest, Melonie Daniels, singing a prayer in her impeccably controlled alto, undaunted by some oblique intervals.

"In This House" felt a bit lopsided with the two intermissions Mr. Marsalis has newly imposed. (The first part stopped too soon, and the third part stretched too long.) Still, it's a powerful success: as a suite, as a statement and as an illustration of where Mr. Marsalis and his organization are coming from, and just how far they have come.